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ABSTRACT

A study examined teachers' reading habits and attitudes. Subjects, 204 educators who were enrolled in classes or a for-credit reading workshop in the northern Illinois area, completed a 32-item survey to determine their reading habits. Respondents were primarily elementary teachers who had earned at least a bachelor's degree and who had six or fewer years of experience in their current position. Results indicated that: (1) over half read at least three journal articles a month and two professional books each year; (2) at least three-fourths read the newspaper daily, one magazine that was not a professional journal, and one book for pleasure reading monthly; however, (3) only half of the respondents reported that administrators where they worked shared research and other professional writing at meetings; (4) only about 40% of the respondents felt that their colleagues frequently referred to ideas and research from professional readings; and (5) respondents felt they did not have enough time for personal or professional reading on the job or at home. Findings suggest that many educators are serving as powerful role-models for life-long literacy; however, ideas that may be helpful in the way educators perceive themselves as readers include: set aside specific time to read and discuss with colleagues; and keep current with professional reading. Administrators should also realize that sharing current professional literature is a cost-cutting means of inservice education. Contains 13 references. (RS)

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TEACHERS AS READERS

We know that reading to children promotes an interest in and affinity toward books. We know that children who see adults reading have positive role models. We know that a major goal of teaching reading to children is to create in them a life-long love of reading (Johns & VanLeirsburg, 1993). We accept this wisdom as basic information when we plan our daily classroom activities to enhance the literacy of our students. A larger question becomes, do we as teachers practice what is preached? And if we don't read to students on a regular basis or choose reading as a pleasurable activity for ourselves (let alone model reading enjoyment for students), why don't we?

In addition to reading for pleasure, do teachers avail themselves of the opportunity to read professional books and journals? There are many sources of information published with sufficient frequency to keep us up to date on the latest theories and best practices for our classrooms. Which ones do most teachers turn to for updates in the discipline of reading? And, again, if we don't read professional materials, why don't we?

The personal and professional reading habits of teachers have been investigated, although not extensively, in recent years. That limited body of research reveals that teachers have a less than favorable disposition toward choosing reading as a recreational activity. The interest of teachers in personal reading has been characterized by Cardarelli (1992) as tepid, less than avid, and discouraging. Mueller (1973) administered a survey to graduate and undergraduate students in an effort to determine leisure time activities. Reading was only valued "mildly," ranking fourth in a list behind watching TV and going to movies. Searls (1985) reported that slightly under half of the teachers she surveyed chose reading first as a recreational activity. In addition, Searls found that about one-third of the respondents felt that reading could be effectively taught by teachers who do not love reading themselves. Manna and Misheff (1987), however, found that preservice and inservice teachers suggested that enthusiasm for reading is "caught not taught. ...Teachers should serve as

models for the kinds of benefits and rewards that reading promises" (p. 166). Mour (1977) discovered that the bulk of personal reading by teachers was done by 25% of a stratified random sample of 224 graduate students who were employed in education. Gray and Troy (1986) found that only 29 future elementary teachers out of a total of 80 questioned were currently reading a book for pleasure.

It has been argued that reading professional journals affords teachers and schools a cost-effective means of inservice, but that teachers are often overwhelmed by the amount of professional materials available and discouraged by technical language that is frequently used (Stopper, 1982). Teachers, it seems, could share ideas and information with one another, but research suggests that teachers seldom talk shop with their colleagues (Pearce, 1984). Another reason cited by teachers for not reading current journals is that articles do not offer suggestions that have direct and immediate value to them in the classroom (Cogan & Anderson, 1977). Lack of time for reading is an issue that leaves professional reading wanting. Bell and Roach (1989) surveyed over 1500 teachers in Arkansas and found that more than one-third had second jobs and another one-third wished they did because of the need for supplemental income to their teaching salaries. Womack and Chandler (1992) evaluated the results from a survey they did of 64 elementary, middle, and high school teachers and noted that society overburdens teachers who simply do not have time for professional reading in addition to the increasing demands of their career and the personal need for family time, both of which take precedence over professional reading.

Studies of preservice and inservice teachers, from elementary through high school, show a common thread of agreement. Teachers, for whatever reason, simply have not been found to be prodigious readers of either personal or professional materials.

It is not enough to observe that teachers are apparently not avid readers. There is a need to know why. Our investigation was guided by several questions. Are teachers readers of both personal

and professional materials? What are some of the things that teachers believe enhance opportunities to read, and what do they perceive as some of the detractors to reading? Knowing what enhances and detracts—the why—from opportunities to read may help us suggest possibilities to enable teachers to choose reading for recreation and information.

Method and Procedure

Womack and Chandler (1992) created a 40-item Survey of Professional Reading to determine the reading habits of teachers. We adapted a portion of it and also included demographic items and personal reading habit items for the purpose of our investigation. Major areas included professional reading, personal reading, enhancers to reading, and detractors to reading. Our 32-item survey, Reading Habits: A Survey for Educators, used a Likert scale in which 1 reflected a statement that was true of the respondent, 3 meant neutral, and 5 reflected a statement that was untrue.

Reading Habits: A Survey for Educators was administered to 204 educators who were enrolled in classes or a for-credit reading workshop in the northern Illinois area during the first six months of 1993. Of the 204 respondents, 64% were elementary teachers, 13% were middle school teachers, 7% were high school teachers, 9% were special reading teachers (Chapter 1, Reading Recovery, reading specialists), and 7% were administrators. Nearly half of the total group had earned a bachelor' s degree and 40% had earned their master's degree; 1% had finished a doctorate, and 5% reported they had completed a K- 12 reading specialist certificate.

In terms of experience, about 60% of the educators had 6 or less years of experience, 26% had between 7 and 15 years of experience, and 13% had 16 or more years of experience in their current position. When asked the number of courses they had taken which related specifically to reading, 4% said they had no reading courses, 65% had from 1 to 6 reading courses, and 30% reported they had taken 7 or more courses in reading. In essence, over half of the individuals we

surveyed were elementary teachers who had taken from 1 to 6 courses in reading and had 6 or less years of experience in their current position.

Results

Professional Reading Habits

It was gratifying to discover that 46% of the group reported reading a minimum of three articles from professional journals each month and 54% read at least two professional books each year. About 40% reported not reading three journal articles each month and 26% had not read at least two professional books during the last year.

Over one-third of the respondents said they enjoyed reading technical or scientific research articles about the teaching profession while about the same number did not enjoy technical reading about teaching. The vast majority of the 204 respondents (85%) preferred practical professional reading that had direct application to teaching.

We were also interested in finding out what impact taking college courses may have on professional reading. Only 30% said that they do just as much reading while taking a college course; about half of the group responded that they do not.

We also asked those we surveyed to list three professional journals that they read the most frequently. The overwhelming choice was *The Reading Teacher*. Other journals chosen with nearly the same frequency as each other were *Instructor*, *Educational Leadership*, *Journal of Reading*, *Language Arts*, and *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Personal Reading Habits

We asked whether teachers read daily newspapers and found that 75% of the respondents read a newspaper every day. We also wondered how many educators read magazines that are not considered a professional or teaching journal. Again, the results were positive: 85% of the group reported reading at least one magazine for pleasure each month.

Knowing the time constraints and curricular demands, we wanted to find out how many teachers actually read aloud to students at least once a week; we found that over 90% of the group surveyed read aloud to their students.

Given the fact that time demands are many, we wondered if teachers would choose pleasure reading over professional reading. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents would choose reading for pleasure over reading professional materials.

Enhancers to Reading

In the workplace, the administrator often sets the tone for what is professionally acceptable. Therefore, some of our survey questions explored whether building administrators perceived reading as important to professional development. About 70% reported that they perceived their administrators as supportive in this area, but about 20% marked "neutral" and 10% did not perceive that their administrator felt professional reading was important. Nearly half of the group, however, reported that their administrator cited research findings during communications with staff.

Journal articles and professional books appear to have an impact in about 60% of the professionals surveyed while 16% reported that written professional thought did not impact their workplace. A little over half the group reported that their colleagues did not discuss professional readings. However, about the same number felt that they stay abreast of changes in the teaching profession. Nearly two-thirds reported that their colleagues shared personal reading suggestions like enjoyable books or magazine articles.

An enhancer to reading frequently cited is time. Nearly one-third of the respondents to our survey reported that they had enough time to read for themselves and to others for pleasure. However, 52% felt they did not have enough time for reading.

An open-ended question gave educators further opportunities to respond to the issue of enhancers to reading. The ideas given by professionals centered around things they can do to spend

more time as readers, given the constraints of job and the need to spend quality family time. Educators suggested using silent reading time and suspension room duty as times during the work day to read. More than one teacher suggested a slight adaptation of lifestyle to include reading by having a book or journal along at all times and by keeping reading materials in the bathroom and car so that unexpected delays in traffic or the doctor's office can be turned into an opportunity to read. Other teachers told us that taking college courses demanded extra professional reading. Time away from school as well as summer or vacation breaks were also listed. Teachers who were also parents welcomed the time to read to their children as a real enhancer to reading. It was also seen as a time to become familiar with many excellent children's books.

Detractors to Reading

There are many factors that kept teachers from enjoying as much reading as they may desire. Time is perhaps the biggest of these; 80% of the educators we surveyed have to make time for professional reading and 62% actively set aside time for pleasure reading. Three-fourths of the group reported that there is not enough time in the work day to read. Nearly two-thirds felt that there is not enough reading time without giving up family time. About half of the group related that taking a college course detracts from their reading time.

Half of the group perceived that their colleagues and administrators supported their professional reading, but over 10% reported that colleagues and administrators were not supportive of their professional reading. Only about 20% of the group surveyed had a second or part-time job. Of the group that reported "moonlighting," over 12% felt that the extra work hours detracted from their opportunities for reading.

Respondents were given a further opportunity to share additional detractors from reading in their lives. They listed responsibilities and obligations of job and home as the biggest reasons why reading could not be given more time in their daily lives. Some teachers also explained that they

were just too tired from a full day of teaching. One teacher felt that teaching involved too much reading and the result was a need to exercise. These detractors represent valid reasons why teachers cannot spend more time as readers.

Summary and Conclusions

Reading Habits: A Survey for Educators was administered to 204 graduate students who were currently enrolled in a reading course or a for-credit workshop to determine if they valued personal and professional reading and had opportunities for reading. The group surveyed was predominately elementary teachers who had earned at least a bachelor's degree (40% had master's degrees), had taken several (between 4 and 10) courses in reading, and who had 6 or less years of experience in their current position. Contrary to many previous research findings, the group of teachers in the present study were active readers. Over half read at least three journal articles a month and two professional books each year. At least three-fourths read the newspaper daily, one magazine that was not a professional journal, and one book for pleasure monthly.

Perhaps the group we surveyed had unusual characteristics. They were all enrolled in a college course for credit. Although we did not gather the data directly, a large percentage of the respondents were female. We cannot, however, determine specific demographic differences between our 204 subjects and other groups reported in the few studies of reading habits over the past twenty years. It may also be that teachers in the 1990s have found a way to save time for professional and personal reading.

Although the general findings reveal that the educators we surveyed are readers of professional and personal material, there are, on the other hand, some disturbing results. First, only half of the respondents reported that the administrators where they worked shared research and other professional writing at meetings and in their interactions with staff. Administrators, as the

instructional leaders of their buildings and districts, would seem to be in a favorable position to share important research and implications for teaching.

Second, only about 40% of the respondents felt that their colleagues frequently referred to ideas and research from professional readings. Many more, about two-thirds of the group, related that their colleagues shared personal reading suggestions. It would seem that teachers are more inclined to share reading that is purely recreational as opposed to sharing research or professional writings. Only about half of the respondents felt that their colleagues approved of their efforts to keep current by reading professional books and journals.

Third, the educators we surveyed responded that they do not have enough time for personal or professional reading either on the job or at home due to responsibilities and desire to spend time with family. With growing responsibilities for many educators in the workplace, time management seems an issue that is difficult to resolve.

Recommendations

Educators and parents serve as strong role models in the lives of children. Adults who choose to read for enjoyment and information give students powerful and positive messages about reading. Our survey shows that many educators are indeed serving as powerful role models for life-long literacy. However, certain aspects detract from the luxury of choosing to read for pleasure and to update professional knowledge. Perhaps some of the following ideas may be helpful in the way educators perceive themselves as readers.

Literacy Models

Much of the research on teacher attitudes and interests relative to reading over the past several years points out that teachers, for whatever reason, do not choose to read. Programs to entice teachers to read have been effective. Cardarelli (1992) described a program, Teachers Under Cover (TUC),

designed to provide middle-grade teachers the opportunity to read and discuss contemporary, best selling books. The program focused on increasing teachers' personal reading and developing awareness and appreciation of colleagues through regular meetings to talk about books read. Success was evident because the 350 teachers who participated across the state of Indiana had a renewed of love of literature, developed a new appreciation of colleagues, and generated enthusiasm that was carried over into the classroom.

TUC required teachers to set aside time for themselves to enjoy and discuss specific novels. Other groups like this could be formed to read and discuss new children's literature or current articles of research and practice. The International Reading Association developed Teachers As Readers, a project designed to gather educators together to discuss children's books, adolescent literature, professional books, and adult books. Whatever the topic, the point of setting aside specific time to read and discuss with colleagues seems a key to promoting teachers as readers. Teachers who read and share are solid role models for their students.

Keeping Current

Burhans wrote that most teachers come from the lowest level of their graduating class and that the "quality and value of their teaching depends in large part on what they know and how well they keep abreast of changing developments in their fields" (1985, p. 91). This is a disturbing, but thought-provoking statement. Consider the wealth of new information in just the past five years about the way we learn to read and comprehend. Technology, too, has advanced rapidly during this time. Concepts in science and math are being revised. In short, unless we read, we are likely teaching from obsolete information. "Keeping up with one's field is an essential element in professionalism" (Burhans, 1985, p. 95).

Teachers need to access information about what to teach and how to teach. Professional reading is a good way to gain this information. Although it may not be possible to read all the best

and most respected journals and authors, discussions with colleagues and sharing pertinent information is vital to professional growth.

Support of Administration

Not many teachers in our survey reported that they had time specifically set aside to read or discuss professional writings during their work day. This is an idea whose time may have come! School budgets of today do not lend themselves to "frivolous" dollars budgeted for teacher reading time. However, savvy administrators realize that sharing current professional literature is truly a cost-cutting means of inservice. Countless variations of grouping, presentations, and discussions could serve to keep teachers more current with research and professional writings. Creative ways to schedule time during the teaching day to share and critique current professional writings would likely be more cost-effective than hiring outside speakers and allotting an entire day for teacher inservice, although speakers will probably remain an integral part of staff development programs. Pearce (1984) described a program of sharing current journal information among classroom teachers. He commented on the payoff of such a system because "people learn more, are more confident, and communicate more accurately if they have credible background knowledge" (p. 1). Educators who want to read more professional materials may design possible ways to use time creatively. Administrators would surely agree to ideas that are cost-effective and promote professional growth.

Teachers who keep current with professional reading and who enjoy personal reading are role models who promote life-long literacy. Ingenuous time management and supportive administrators and colleagues will enable teachers to have opportunities to read. Teachers who avail themselves of these opportunities are the readers we need in the classroom.

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